

In a Clearing

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Set during TPM

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Set during the Phantom Menace, after Padme reveals her true identity to the Gungan leader and exposes the 'queen' as a decoy. Obi Wan is not impressed by the deception but before he can speak to Padme, he is alerted to a new threat to the Naboo Queen. Story hints at the friendship that will grow between the Jedi and the young queen.

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Obi Wan Kenobi exchanged a surprised glance with Qui Gon Jinn. His master seemed every bit as startled as himself. Remembering where they were, both men hastily followed the newly revealed Queen Amidala's example and knelt down before the Gungan leader. Some tense moments passed as the Gungan considered the young queen's proposal. He finally exploded into a fit of raucous laughter, his small body rocking with mirth. He spluttered a few words, which sealed the pact between the planet's two peoples.

As the crowd around them cheered with wild excitement, the two Jedi turned slowly to one another.

"You didn't know?" Obi Wan asked of his master rather unnecessarily,

for he had felt the older man's surprise moments earlier. The Jedi master shook his head.

"I had sensed some deception on their part" he murmured, while casting a vigilant look at those congratulating the young monarch. "But I suspected that they were merely reluctant to trust us completely".

Obi Wan retreated a little as the people around them began to slowly disperse. Never taking his eyes off the Queen, he spoke softly, "So, I have been protecting a mere handmaiden for the past few days..." "While I allowed the Queen of Naboo to traipse around Mos Espa", the older Jedi finished rather ruefully.

His Padawan was barely listening. "A mere handmaiden" he repeated in a tone, which grew increasingly indignant at the thoughts of his mighty Jedi skills being so abused. Qui Gon Jinn suppressed a smile. Trust Obi Wan to take the Naboo deception personally.

"Never mind Padawan" he said soothingly as they discreetly followed the Queen who was now making her way back to the hastily erected Naboo camp. "She fooled a lot of people. But now we know exactly who she is. And who we need to protect".

Obi Wan straightened slightly. "Of course Master" he said stiffly "But I don't think she should be allowed to deceive us like this and still expectâ€¦"

"Expect what?" Qui Gon said sharply as he paused mid step. Sometimes Obi Wan needed a firm reminder about the obligations of his chosen profession. "Our protection? That is what she shall have and it is your duty as a Jedi to provide it. Your pride is irrelevant, her safety is paramount".

Obi Wan nodded, his eyes drifting to the ground before reluctantly rising to meet those of Qui Gon. The Jedi Master saw his pupil's unspoken apology in that piercing blue gaze. He nodded in approval and clapped the younger Jedi on the back.

Both men resumed their watchful walk behind the royal entourage. "Of course" Qui Gon said moments later, with a half smile, "Protecting her doesn't mean you can't speak your mind". He threw a knowing look in his pupil's direction before hastening his pace in an effort to avoid a conversation with a certain Gungan who was advancing ominously upon the two Jedi.

Qui Gon might have escaped Jar Jar but his Padawan was not quite so lucky. Obi Wan smiled politely through half of the Gungan's rambling speech about the joyous reunification of Naboo's people before he managed to escape the overfriendly alien. By then, they had almost reached the rendez vous point. The young Queen was surrounded by her advisors, all of whom seemed to have something urgent to tell her. Hardly an appropriate time to interrupt her, the young Jedi mused to himself. At a momentary loss, Obi Wan decided to scan the considerably large group of people who stood waiting to hear their leader's assault plans.

Starting with the Naboo, the Jedi reached outward with the Force and instantly heard the whisperings of the assorted Naboo minds present. All seemed anxious, frightened and nervous but nothing malevolent

lurked among their thoughts. He was distracted by something else, another presence. Probing slightly further, he was amused to recognise Qui Gon's consciousness absorbed with the same task Obi Wan had taken upon himself.

He sensed Qui Gon's own inward amusement before receiving a Force thought. "Mind if I leave you to it?" The Jedi felt the words flow through his mind and sensed his Master tuning out of the scan. Glancing over at Qui Gon, he saw that his mentor had been interrupted by young Anakin who seemed intent on telling the Master something or another.

With a grin, Obi Wan relaxed and closed his eyes. He projected outwards again, this time toward the Gungans scattered around the rendez vous area. He brushed against their minds, picking up on their own confused jumble of emotions. Fear, bewilderment, mistrust, all completely natural considering the unlikely alliance their leader had just made with the Naboo. Pushing further, Obi Wan felt and understood their predicament. Forced into a partnership with a people they barely liked. Amongst the fear, Obi Wan caught a hint of something else. A smoldering darkness.

"Mr Kenobi".

Queen Amidala's voice rang clearly behind him, disturbing his scan. He pressed on, ignoring her, still searching for the owner of the dark thoughts.

"Jedi Kenobi" she repeated more insistently, "I wanted to ask you..."

He pinpointed it. His eyes snapped open. He turned to face the young monarch who stood a little impatiently, flanked by a Gungan on either side of her. He looked intently at both before recognising the same feeling in each of them. Hatred. Directed toward Padme.

Inwardly groaning, Obi Wan considered how to get the queen away from the pair with making a fuss. He didn't want to end the alliance as quickly as it had begun and that would surely happen if the Gungans saw a Jedi sparring with two of their own people. Qui Gon, he sent silently, we have trouble. Across from him, Qui Gon pushed Anakin down from his lap and jumped to his feet, his hand gripping his holstered lightsaber.

Obi Wan called calmly to the queen who by now looked mildly confused.

"Your Highness" he said with an impeccably polished charm "I have been hoping to speak to you privately".

He threw out an arm, gesturing that she should join him. The queen surveyed the young man in front of her for a moment. She had given up trying to understand either Jedi days ago but their strange ways fascinated her.

"Your Highness", one of the Gungan's placed a demanding hand on her wrist, interrupting her brief contemplation, "We had asked to speak with you also". The girl looked down at them.

"You're right" she conceded before turning back to excuse herself to

the Jedi. Obi Wan had taken a step closer.

"I won't keep her long" he said with a pleasant smile to the two would be assailants.

The queen was indignant. These Jedi had little respect for her rank. That much had been clear from Qui Gon's attitude on Tatooine. Now his Padawan dictated whom she would speak with. The Gungan distracted her again by tugging a little more persistently on her wrist. Another who paid little attention to court protocol. Still she couldn't afford to be churlish with her new associates.

"Your Highness" the Gungan repeated quietly, in a tone that implied she should deal with this overbearing Offworlder. He was right.

Turning back to Obi Wan, Padme said diplomatically "This won't take long. I will be with you in just a moment".

The Jedi wasn't listening. In fact he wasn't paying attention to her at all. A dangerous smile played on his lips as he looked at the Gungan.

"Step away from her" he told the surly alien in a casual but menacing tone. Qui Gon joined his friend silently, standing back watching some nearby Gungan's, who had themselves been following the conversation. The queen stared at the young man in astonishment, momentarily wondering if she had heard him correctly. She recovered her composure and decided that he had taken leave of his senses. It was time to take control of these Jedi.

"I don't know what you think you are doing" she said in her most regal voice "But you have no business speaking to anyone that way, let alone an ally." The Jedi held up a hand to silence her. His direct gaze at the Gungan didn't waver.

"I know of your intentions" he told the alien calmly "I will not allow you to harm her". Padme's confusion cleared. The Jedi had spoken authoritatively, with certainty.

Looking down at the Gungan in horror, she tried to pull away from his grasp but found it surprisingly strong. A rising panic within her was suddenly quelled by two familiar voices that reverberated through her mind.

Stay calm, Qui Gon commanded firmly, Do not move. Do as we say. Obi Wan spoke with a quiet confidence. Do not fear, his voice assured her gently, We will protect you. No harm can come to you when we are with you. Don't struggle. Stay with us, near us. You are safe.

The words tumbled through her mind, quenching her fears. Her eyes met those of the young Jedi and she drew comfort from them. Amidala suddenly trusted him completely. She half nodded. He smiled in brief understanding before diverting his attention back to the Gungans.

"You cannot beat us," he said with conviction.

The Gungan still held tightly to his prize. "You can't start anything here Jedi" he hissed vehemently "My people would defend us".

Obi Wan nodded in agreement. "Perhaps" he said conversationally as he looked up thoughtfully at the sky. His fingers brushed against his lightsaber and he looked back at the alien with a tight smile.

"But I'll protect her all the same. Even if it means killing you."

The other Gungan suddenly snarled. Pulling the queen to him, he produced a blaster and pointed it threateningly at the girl. "No tricks Jedi", he spat out while gazing nervously around the campsite. The two Jedi had drawn their sabers during the Gungan's quick movement. Qui Gon spun around his lit saber deterring the Gungans approaching behind from coming any closer. He was confident that his apprentice was capable of handling the crisis.

Obi Wan swirled his saber playfully. "You think Boss Nass will be impressed?" he asked politely.

The Gungan smiled bitterly, "I think he would be glad we saved him doing it himself when she eventually betrays us".

"I won't betray..." Padme began to explain, but a firm repositioning of the blaster silenced her. Obi Wan felt a flicker of fear race through her. He looked around. No sign of Boss Nass yet. He had hoped that delaying the two Gungans until their leader arrived would end the incident. Unfortunately, it looked like he would have to disarm these pair himself. Which wasn't a problem. The increasing number of suspicious Gungans standing in front of Qui Gon on the other hand, was a problem. He would have to resolve this with tact. Taking a breath, he flipped himself over the smaller of the Gungans and with a deft flick of his lightsaber, knocked the blaster from the alien's grasp while simultaneously pulling the queen back to him. Using the Force, he pulled the other Gungan's blaster to his own holster. The murmuring among the Gungan spectators now became an angry heckling.

Qui Gon now swirled his own lightsaber warningly. "No one has been hurt," he said carefully but alertly, "Let's keep it that way". Still holding Padme, Obi Wan stepped forward to join his master. The two men looked like a formidable team, Padme thought to herself. They looked like a threatening team, she corrected herself.

Deciding to put her diplomatic skills to use, she tugged herself free of Obi Wan's hold. She pushed out past the two Jedi and stepped amongst the Gungan who rushed around her. The Jedi looked alarmed and instantly followed the young queen, brandishing their lightsabers. Padme raised her hand and this time it was Obi Wan who halted, as did Qui Gon. The Gungans quietened, all aware of how the fragile alliance could be affected by the words of the young Naboo queen.

"These two men" she said, pointing to the two Gungans who now stood rather shakily behind the Jedi "Are typical of what we all must overcome. Our fear, our prejudice, our hatred".

She paused, allowing her words to sink in. "We must learn to trust one another if we are to take back our world. If we cannot trust one another, how can we fight our common enemy? Today is a new beginning for our two peoples. We cannot allow our fears to conquer us. To show my own desire to befriend the Gungan people, I will not allow charges

to be pressed against these two men".

The young queen flashed her rare smile. Head held high, she walked smoothly through her new allies. The Gungans stepped back respectfully as the girl passed by them.

The two Jedi extinguished their lightsabers. Obi Wan stared after Padme, full of admiration for her. He shot a quick glance at his master before following the path she had just taken. Padme had walked into a smaller clearing and now stood quietly leaning against an old gnarled tree. The young Jedi could sense her struggling to control her turbulent emotions. Pausing behind her, he placed a tentative hand on her shoulder.

"Are you all right?" he asked hesitantly.

She nodded. "Thank you for what you did back there".

The queen's sincerity was genuine, of that he was certain. Her face was troubled.

"You didn't answer my question", he said evenly.

"I'm fine", she said avoiding direct eye contact, seemingly more interested in the growth of the grass beneath their feet.

Obi Wan smiled at her words. Placing his lightsaber back into its holster, he remarked bemusedly "You know, most people know better than to lie to a Jedi".

Padme looked up with a guilty grin, "I guess there's no point in trying," she said with a tinge of regret. She wasn't sure that she liked having someone recognise everything she felt.

"No point at all" he replied frankly.

A bird rustled in the trees above them. Padme jumped at the sound, still on edge. Obi Wan surveyed her for a moment before tilting her chin upwards so that she could see her earlier sincerity reflected in his own eyes.

"I meant what I said" he promised the young girl. "You are safe with us".

Padme nodded and as she did so, she realised that she truly believed him.

The Jedi turned, his eyes flicking upwards, tracing the path just taken by the small bird. "At least" Obi Wan said wryly "You're safe, now that we know who you are". Naboo's ruler didn't look remotely apologetic for her previous deception.

"I didn't know if we could trust you" she explained with patience.

He rolled his eyes at her.

"If you can't trust a Jedi, who can you trust?" he demanded teasingly.

"Myself" the quiet answer came.

Obi Wan felt a surge of interest well within him. This girl was intriguing. So young, yet so determined. He was fascinated.

"Not any more" he told her sternly "From now on, we're a team. Understand?"

Again their eyes locked and a mutual understanding shone in the others eyes. They each felt a new sense of warmth from the other. Friendship.

"Well I guess I have just made another alliance", Padme said finally with a hint of fresh hope in her voice. The sounds of shuttles landing nearby tore her attention away from the young man standing next to her. That rare smile again.

"Its time to fill you and your master in on my plan to regain control." she said cheerfully.

Accepting his outstretched hand, the youthful queen linked arms with the Jedi and together they left the clearing, to reclaim Naboo

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file.